

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2004

Contact:

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WASHINGTON - The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) will hold a public, on-the-record hearing on Friday, April 30 at the CUNY Queens College School of Law in Flushing, NY on "Bangladesh: Protecting the Human Rights of Thought, Conscience, and Religion." The hearing is scheduled from 6:30-8:00 p.m. in the auditorium of the City University of New York (CUNY) School of Law, 65-21 Main Street, Flushing, NY.

The hearing will examine recent trends regarding religious freedom for both Muslims and non-Muslims in Bangladesh and the implications of those trends for U.S. policy. Bangladesh has constitutional and other legal protections for human rights. Nevertheless, there were numerous reports of severe abuses targeting members of religious minorities at the time of the national elections in October 2001. In addition, according to the State Department violence against women is widespread and sometimes led by religious leaders, particularly in rural areas. There is concern that the growth of religious extremism could have a negative impact on the rights of all Bangladeshis.

Congressman Joseph Crowley, representing New York's 7th Congressional District, will participate in this event. Congressman Crowley, a member of the House Committee on International Relations, is Chair and founder of the Congressional Caucus on Bangladesh. He represents the second largest South Asian community in the United States, based in Jackson Heights, Queens. This past January, Congressman Crowley made his second trip to Bangladesh, which was sponsored by the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), where he visited with the Prime Minister of Bangladesh, the leader of the Awami League, and other high level ministerial officials. He also participated in the groundbreaking of the Asian University for Woman in Chittagong, and visited a UNFPA project site.

**WHAT:** "Bangladesh: Protecting the Human Rights of Thought, Conscience, and Religion"

**WHEN:** Friday, April 30, 2004, 6:30-8:00 p.m.

**WHERE:** City University of New York (CUNY), Queens College

School of Law Auditorium, 65-21 Main Street, Flushing, NY

**Confirmed witnesses are as follows:**

Latifur Rahman, former Chief Justice of Bangladesh

U. A. B. Razia Akter Banu, Professor of Political Science, University

of Dhaka

Abbas Faiz, Amnesty International's lead researcher on Bangladesh

Aroma Dutta, civil society activist and Executive Director, PRIP Trust

Faustina Pereira, advocate, Supreme Court of Bangladesh

**The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom** was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, the Secretary of State and the Congress.

- Dean Michael K. Young ,
- Felice D. Gaer ,